

Common Vision Disorders

People of all ages may experience the following conditions.

- Myopia or nearsightedness. The cornea and lens work together to make the viewed image come into clear focus at a point in front of the retina, so what the retina receives is a blurred image of items far away.
- Hyperopia, or farsightedness, occurs when the image hasn't quite come into focus when it gets to the retina.
- Astigmatism, unevenness in the cornea, means that the image viewed is distorted, sometimes in different areas in the field of vision.

As we age, almost everyone experiences some changes in vision. This is called presbyopia, which simply means "aging eyes." These include:

- Loss in the ability to focus on things close to us
- Small print becomes more difficult to see
- It takes longer to switch focus from something close to something far away

As we age the likelihood of more serious vision problems increases with each passing decade. The four most common eye disorders of older adults are:

- Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) is the most common cause of vision loss in older adults. AMD is characterized by a blurring in the center of the field of vision due to deterioration of the macula, the center of the retina. When the macula deteriorates, it cannot receive the focused image from the cornea and lens and then transmit a clear signal to the brain for interpretation. The center of the image the person sees is blurred and darkened, and colors seem muted.
- Glaucoma is experienced as a loss of peripheral vision, which is the sight around the sides of the field of vision. Glaucoma damages the optic nerve that carries messages from the eye to the brain. A common cause of damage to the optic nerve results from increased pressure, called intraocular pressure (IOP), inside the eye. However, some people with normal levels of IOP experience optic nerve damage as a result of an injury, a tumor, inflammation, diabetes, or use of steroids.
- Cataracts are a clouding of the lens in the eye. Cataracts result when proteins in the lens of the eye clump together and harden, clouding the lens. The person with cataracts feels as if she's looking through a brown fog.
- Diabetic retinopathy is a common complication of long-term diabetes. Blood vessels in the back of the eye leak, distorting and damaging the retina so it cannot receive images projected by the cornea and lens. Laser surgery can stop some bleeding, if it not severe, but may result in the formation of scars that also might distort vision.

Some normal vision changes occur as we get older, but we should still be able to maintain healthy eyesight. The first step to eye care is a regular vision check-up with a qualified eye care professional.

Common Vision Disorders



A person with normal vision would view a scene like this.

Age-related macular-degeneration (AMD).
Loss of vision in the middle of vision.



Glaucoma. Loss of vision around
edges of field of vision.



Cataracts. Clouding of vision.



Diabetic retinopathy.
Darkened spots that obscure portions of vision.